

Written evidence submitted by Professor Francesca Gains

Introduction

1. I am a Professor of Public Policy and Academic Co-Director of Policy@Manchester - The University of Manchester's policy engagement unit. In 2019, I joined the Strategy Board of [GM4Women2028](#), and in 2020 I was invited to join the [Greater Manchester Women and Girls' Equality Panel](#).
2. My research focuses on gender policy change; diversity and representation in policymaking process; political management reform in central and local government; and English devolution and introduction of police and crime commissioners with my current research project centred around *Understanding Institutional Change from a Gendered Perspective: The work of Police and Crime Commissioners*.
3. In this evidence submission, I draw on [my own research and that of colleagues at The University of Manchester](#) and discussions with the Greater Manchester Women and Girls' Equality Panel, which has examined the impact of COVID-19 and the recovery agenda for women's education, skills and employment.
4. My submission to the inquiry specifically addresses the following areas in the call for evidence:
 - a. How has the economic impact of the crisis affected disability, gender, and race inequality?
 - b. How has the crisis impacted on regional inequality?

Summary

5. There is long-standing gendered occupational segregation across all combined authority areas in England. The sectors most impacted by COVID-19 are those where women are overrepresented, whereas the sectors targeted for growth in recovery are those where men are overrepresented.
6. Before and during the pandemic there has been pressure on women to manage work and care responsibilities.
7. The combination of occupational segregation and caregiving responsibilities are likely to lead to women leaving the labour market and being unable to transition to sectors targeted for growth.
8. Combined authorities are key in identifying how the economic impact of the crisis has affected gender, disability and race inequality; and how to address these impacts through their local industrial strategies, their work with LEPs, local authorities, Growth Hubs, local employers and training providers to promote place-based innovation and economic regeneration.
9. However, central government needs to provide further funding for childcare to allow women to maintain their relationship with the labour market and to be able to undertake retraining in order that they can move into different sectors of the labour market.

The problem of occupational segregation in the labour market

10. Gender inequality builds over the life cycle, starting with differing educational and skills-based choices made by young men and women ([Lupton, R, 2019](#)), leading to occupational segregation ([Gains, F, Sanders, A, 2019](#)); women move into part-time work because of the challenges of combining work and care ([Norman H, et al 2019](#)); we then see how gender pay gaps develop and risks of low pay ([Rubery, J, 2019](#)), overall leading to poorer income security in older age ([Price, D, 2019](#)). These risks are particularly faced by women from communities facing racial inequalities. ([Policy@Manchester, 2019](#)).
11. These long-term and structural gendered patterns form the backdrop to understanding the impact of the pandemic on productivity levels, which then forms a cyclical pattern on the impact of women's role in the workplace.
12. The pandemic has created the potential to exacerbate gender inequality, with this divide differing between geographical locations.
13. Analysis from Policy@Manchester of the Office of National Statistics (ONS) data from the pre-pandemic period of [2019 demonstrated that there is occupational segregation in the labour market in all combined authorities](#).
14. Analysis from 2020 may be currently skewed by financial support schemes, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, but there is still [clear evidence that occupational segregation persists](#).
15. In many sectors, we can see an underrepresentation of one gender, followed by the opposing gender being overrepresented. Occupations such as caring, health and social care; administrative and secretarial roles; leisure, travel and personal service and retail roles all see an overrepresentation of women. Simultaneously, these are sectors (especially retail and hospitality) that have been particularly badly affected by COVID-19 restrictions, including social distancing, lockdown, redundancy or furlough measures.
16. On the contrary, data shows the occupational sectors where men are overrepresented are in managerial and professional sectors, skilled trades, STEM occupations and construction – all of which suffered severely less during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they were either able to remain open during the restrictions or work from home. What's more, these sectors are likely to feature, and be keenly promoted in government strategies, in the recovery levelling up agenda, and in local industrial strategies and local recovery plans; for example, green growth industries or a push towards an increase of productivity in the digital sector.
17. **We must ensure that sectors (such as hospitality and retail) which feature the majority of female employees are offered support, funding and aid during and after the pandemic in order to retain jobs, and limit the impact COVID-19 has on the progress of gender equality in the labour market.**
18. Furthermore, while there has always been clear data showing that fewer women take up positions in STEM sectors, much less higher managerial and technical roles, there has been concern expressed by early research that the pandemic will have more long-term negative impacts for women than men because they are more likely to be on short-term contracts.
19. One example of an industry booming where women are under-represented is the tech sector. Over the last 20 years or so, advances in digitalisation led to grounds for optimism – particularly as women have more access to a wide variety of ICTs. Yet, the IT industry remains riddled with gender inequalities. The enduring

underrepresentation and marginalisation of women in technology occupations and professions is becoming more severe and those women who are employed in the sector tend to be concentrated in lower-paid jobs. ([Howcroft D, 2019](#))

20. **National and local government, businesses and educational sectors must provide detailed training and support such as digital skills to encourage women to enter industries in which they are currently underrepresented, and to give them the skills needed to progress to higher-paid positions such as managerial and technical roles .**
21. However, a key challenge not just in the tech sector but in various other sectors, is not simply about increasing the number of women entering a certain profession, but about retention and progression. The challenge will involve removing embedded gender discrimination in working environments where women aim to build a career. ([Howcroft D, 2019](#))
22. While education and/or retraining has to be a priority in order to provide women with the skills needed to enter these sectors, to attract more women to the industry and increase retention, more equitable models of working, such as a shorter working week, job sharing, enhanced parental leave, a reduction in wage inequalities and constant development and career progression opportunities could help challenge some of the gendered boundaries in the workplace. ([Howcroft D, 2019](#))
23. **Policy action to address these inequalities should encourage women to enter occupational sectors in which they are currently underrepresented, such as process, plant and machine occupations, or skilled trade occupations. At the same time, attempts should be made to attract more men into occupational sectors in which they remain underrepresented, such as caring and leisure services, or administrative roles.** ([Gains, F, Sanders, A, 2019](#))

The importance of place-based leadership in economic recovery

24. This pattern of occupational segregation is found in all combined authority areas – but the mix might vary slightly, which is important particularly when it comes to thinking about where to target skills training post-pandemic. For example, [data for 2019](#) shows Greater Manchester has a high reliance on the retail sector; and in the Liverpool City Region there was a very high proportion of women working in leisure, travel and personal service – sectors which see women face risk of redundancy, and also threats to small businesses, many of which are run by women. Whereas, in Cambridge and Peterborough there was a higher than average proportion of women working in Science, Engineering and Technology Associate Professionals.
25. Current data shows signs of women in STEM sectors in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough losing their jobs; [in 2019, there was 55% female employment rate in Science, Engineering and Technology Associate Professionals; however this drops rapidly to 26% in 2020.](#)
26. **To combat these issues place-based leadership is important. Action needs to be taken on local and combined authority levels, with each authority being given the freedom, resources and ability to focus on changes that will make the biggest impact to women and productivity levels.**
27. Combined authorities and local authorities are key to increasing productivity levels, by developing local industrial strategies and local recovery plans based on sectors that already thrive in the area, but also by focusing on those they hope to grow. Together, with creating interrelated strategies – bettering education; supporting skills

and training, especially targeting specific industries in which women are underrepresented; encouraging local employers and businesses to encourage parent-friendly working expectations; and developing transport and housing opportunities ([Policy@Manchester, 2019](#)) – combined authorities can create a much more effective path to opportunities for women in the local area.

28. Combined authorities are key in identifying how the economic impact of the crisis has affected disability, gender, and race inequality and how to address these impacts through their local industrial strategies and local recovery plans, their work with LEPs, local authorities, Growth Hubs, local employers and training providers to promote innovation and economic regeneration.
29. The establishment of the Greater Manchester Women and Girls' Equality Panel has offered the opportunity to examine in detail the gendered impact of the pandemic in the combined authority and to consider the education, skills and employment policy levers available to take action to mitigate these impacts. Discussions have focused on how the Combined Authority works with employers through its Good Employment Charter to promote family-friendly working arrangements; support employers and training providers to open up training and retraining opportunities and offer business start-up support for women in sectors where they are underrepresented.

The importance of childcare provision in supporting women to train or retrain

30. Evidence presented at the Panel pointed to the issues faced by the childcare sector currently and the huge importance of childcare for women to remain in the labour market and take up training and retraining. A recent survey of Greater Manchester childcare providers found one in five providers were uncertain they would be open in 12 months' time and expected staffing reductions.
31. Women do most of the work involved in looking after children and other family members. In the UK, mothers spend more than double the amount of time on childcare than fathers. ([ONS, 2016](#)) There is no regional data for time spent on childcare but the situation is likely to be similar for families across city-regions due to the design of national work-family policy combined with the lower earnings of women. ([Norman H, et al 2019](#))
32. Although attitudes and cultures about the role of women raising a family are changing, with men becoming more willing to stay at home, there are multiple factors that limit this from happening, such as the level of Statutory Maternity Pay offered compared to paternity pay; Shared Parental Leave; although parents are able to share up to 50 weeks' leave and 37 weeks' pay it is rarely taken up because the policy is too complicated, mothers are reluctant to give up part of their entitlement, and it is too low paid compared to many males' wages ([Norman H, et al 2019](#)); childcare is expensive and costs continue to rise ([Norman H, Fagan, C, 2017](#)).
33. The gender pay gap currently shown by the Office for National Statistics for 2020 was at 15.5% among all employees ([ONS, 2020](#)). As men earn more than women, often logic prevails for them to carry on in employment, whilst the woman leaves employment or switches to part time in order to provide childcare.
34. The cost of childcare provision is a major barrier to accessing or maintaining employment and training. For 2-year-olds, free early childcare (up to 15 hours) is only available to those eligible. All 3-4-year-olds are eligible for 15 hours childcare but the extended offer (for up to 30 hours) is only for working parents and not for those undertaking training.

35. **The government must consider increasing the amount of hours included in the statutory early year's childcare entitlement to over 30 hours a week. Moreover the entitlement only covers 38 weeks a year which must be increased to cover school holidays. Finally, there is a childcare gap between the end of maternity leave and the start of the free provision which must be covered by either extending the childcare support or supplementing it with another policy, allowing mothers return to work as soon as their maternity leave ends.** ([Norman H, et al 2019](#))
36. During the pandemic there has been a shift in working patterns with many people working from home. One could suppose that flexible working or working from home could help mothers balance work duties and childcare responsibilities. However balancing work and childcare – as children were schooled from home for many months – has increased the amount of pressure felt by women. Despite the government allowing employers to furlough workers on the grounds of childcare, seven out of ten mothers who responded to a poll by TUC had their requests for furlough turned down with a quarter fearing they would lose their jobs. ([Tavora, I, Rubery, J, 2021](#))
37. The UK approach contrasts with how the majority of European countries protected parents during the first COVID-19 wave. Within the EU, 16 out of 27 member states provided paid parental leave as a right. As a country, we must take note from other nations' parental leave schemes, not just during the pandemic period but after it is over in order to rebalance gender equality, by giving families the opportunities to share care responsibilities without having to decide between finances and careers. ([Tavora, I, Rubery, J, 2021](#))
38. **Future national policies and local government strategies created have to provide adequate childcare options for families, including increasing the childcare entitlement, making shared parental leave easier to take up and giving the option for men to take over childcare responsibilities.**

Summary of recommendations

39. We must ensure that sectors (such as hospitality and retail) which feature the majority of female employees are offered support, funding and aid during and after the pandemic in order to retain jobs, and limit the impact COVID-19 has on the progress of gender equality in the labour market.
40. National and local government, businesses and educational sectors must provide detailed training and support such as digital skills to encourage women to enter industries in which they are currently underrepresented, and to give them the skills needed to progress to higher-paid positions such as managerial and technical roles .
41. Policy action to address inequalities should encourage women to enter occupational sectors in which they are currently underrepresented, such as process, plant and machine occupations, or skilled trade occupations. At the same time, attempts should be made to attract more men into occupational sectors in which they remain underrepresented, such as caring and leisure services, or administrative roles. ([Gains, F, Sanders, A, 2019](#))
42. To combat these issues place-based leadership is important. Action needs to be taken on local and combined authority levels, with each authority being given the freedom, resources and ability to focus on changes that will make the biggest impact to women and productivity levels.

43. The government must consider increasing the amount of hours included in the statutory early year's childcare entitlement to over 30 hours a week. Moreover the entitlement only covers 38 weeks a year which must be increased to cover school holidays. Finally, there is a childcare gap between the end of maternity leave and the start of the free provision which must be covered by either extending the childcare support or supplementing it with another policy, allowing mothers return to work as soon as their maternity leave ends. ([Norman H, et al 2019](#))
44. Future national policies and local government strategies created have to provide adequate childcare options for families, including increasing the childcare entitlement, making shared parental leave easier to take up and giving the option for men to take over childcare responsibilities.

Bibliography

- Gains, F, Sanders, A., 2019. [Gender and occupational segregation in Greater Manchester. \[Blog\] Policy@Manchester Blogs](#) (originally published in *On Gender*, 2019).
- Howcroft, D., 2019. [Striving for gender balance in the IT industry.\[Blog\] Policy@Manchester Blogs](#) (originally published in *On Gender*, 2019).
- Lupton, R., 2019. [Gender disparities in education. \[Blog\] Policy@Manchester Blogs.](#) (originally published in *On Gender*, 2019).
- Norman, H, Fagan, C., 2017. [Tackling the problem of childcare. \[Blog\] Working Families.](#)
- Norman, H, Fagan, C, Teasdale, N., 2019. [Fathers and care. \[Blog\] Policy@Manchester Blogs](#) (originally published in *On Gender*, 2019).
- The Office for National Statistics., 2016. [Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work'](#) *Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work'*. London.
- The Office of National Statistics, 2020. [Gender pay gap in the UK: 2020.](#) London.
- Policy@Manchester., 2019. [On Gender.](#)
- Price, D., 2019. [Gender and ageing. \[Blog\] Policy@Manchester Blogs](#) (originally published in *On Gender*, 2019).
- Rubery, J., 2019. [The gender pay gap in Greater Manchester: What it tells us and what it doesn't tell us about gender equality. \[Blog\] Policy@Manchester Blogs](#) (originally published in *On Gender*, 2019).
- Tavora, I, Rubery, J., 2021. [Why parents need the right to stay home without risk to their income or jobs when schools are closed. \[Blog\] Policy@Manchester Blogs.](#)

June 2021